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Heath dispels 'For Your Eyes Only' image of information job

By TONY ALLEN-MILLS

MR HEATH admitted modestly yesterday that he does not look like James Bond. Nor, despite his adventurous career as a champion yachtsman, does he behave like James Bond.

Thus did the former Prime Minister seek to dispel any notion that his new £50,000-a-year job overseeing an American computerised information service had anything to do with the world of moles, or Aston Martins with ejector seats.

According to Mr Heath, the newly-formed International Reporting Information Systems is a businessman's boon.

Despite the proliferation of newspapers, magazines, broadcasting stations and news agencies around the globe, it seems that the business world is still rather in the dark as to what actually goes on.

For an annual fee of about £125,000, Iris—as the outfit is familiarly known—will tell them.

Its computer will read all the world's serious newspapers, listen to all the world's radio stations, and store the reports of 96 special correspondents turning the facts into analysis.

Businessmen who only want a little information about certain parts of the world could pay only £15,000 a year.

Impartial picture

"I saw, through my work on the Brandt Commission, how inadequate information is about many parts of the world," Mr Heath said at a Press conference yesterday.

"What appealed to me about Iris was its objective to give businessmen as full and as impartial a picture as possible."

Suggestions that it was in any sense a spy network with Mr Heath as "M"—the James Bond spymaster—were "ridiculous," the deposed Tory leader said.

He joked that if, for example, the organisation were connected with the CIA, his reported salary of £50,000 would be "grossly underpaid."

For someone who had just professed intense dedication to the ideal of improving the flow of information, Mr Heath turned distinctly coy when his remuneration was mentioned.

Respectable air

What about the celebrated £50,000 (a figure emanating from impeccable Iris management sources)? — "Speculation."

How much was he getting then? — "That is a matter between me and the company."

Mr Heath was no more forthcoming on how much work he would actually be doing for Iris. After the conference I asked him if he would be putting in, say, a couple of days at the office a week. "No, no, nothing like that."

His official title is Chairman of the International Advisory Council, a group of six or seven important worthies whose eminently successful careers lend Iris an air of the utmost respectability.

According to Mr Heath, this group will meet "as appropriate" as editorial overlords of Iris's intelligence output. The computer will be handling 10,000 items a day, and evidently the council would not be inspecting everything circulated to clients.

But the task of Mr Heath and colleagues including Robert McNamara, former President of the World Bank, will apparently be to check that

everything is running smoothly and that Iris is not pushing out material that might give the organisation a bad name.

This does not seem to involve very many hours work a week, and Mr Heath confirmed that the arrangement would not affect his political work or the way he looks after his constituency.

Z/Q analysis

But if Mr Heath hogged the limelight at yesterday's launch, there was no doubt who is the real star of the outfit — Mr Lee T. Feldman, an American whizzkid who knows so much about computers that his colleagues repeatedly had to tell him to shut up.

His audience of journalists were failing to follow his dazzling expositions on the nature of information correlation, Z/Q analysis, textual data input and screening and content dissemination.

Mr Feldman's computer is said to be bigger than the CIA's, and only he understands it. When he was 15, Mr Feldman took a special course of studies in immunochemistry at Rockefeller University, New York.

He then worked on aspects of the Skylab programme, before joining an engineering corporation to develop new technologies in petroleum processing.

Mr Feldman is Director of Systems and Development for Iris, and is responsible for ensuring that the computer keeps ahead in the competitive world of news gathering by reaching the information that other news gatherers cannot reach.

Lee Feldman is 27.

Youthful genius

Next to him, even Mr Heath's shining intellect looked dowdy. As the youthful genius embarked on yet another "simplified" explanation of Collection Objectives and Review Screened Information, the pianist's eyes glazed over.

But the former Prime Minister made it clear that he has not accepted his American bedfellows entirely on trust: he admitted that he had "checked out" his colleagues before agreeing to accept the post.

How did he know they were clean? — "Through the normal means of checking them out."

What were the normal means? — "Talking to colleagues, other things." — Mr Heath gave one of those enigmatic shrugs of the shoulders.

Apart from the general information service, clients — which are likely to include governments as well as businesses — will be able to buy analyses of individual countries, personalities, or obtain specific responses to their own individual enquiries.

The men who are to provide the computer with its stocks of weighty analysis will be the "best political journalists in the world," he said.

Mr Heath disclosed that he was not a shareholder in the new corporation.

"I haven't got any money," he said, and added almost as an afterthought: "It would be wrong for a member of the advisory council to hold shares. We value our independence."

As he walked from the airy salon in the Connaught Rooms, the voice of Mr Lee T. Feldman could just be heard... explaining the mechanics of quantitative scenario models.